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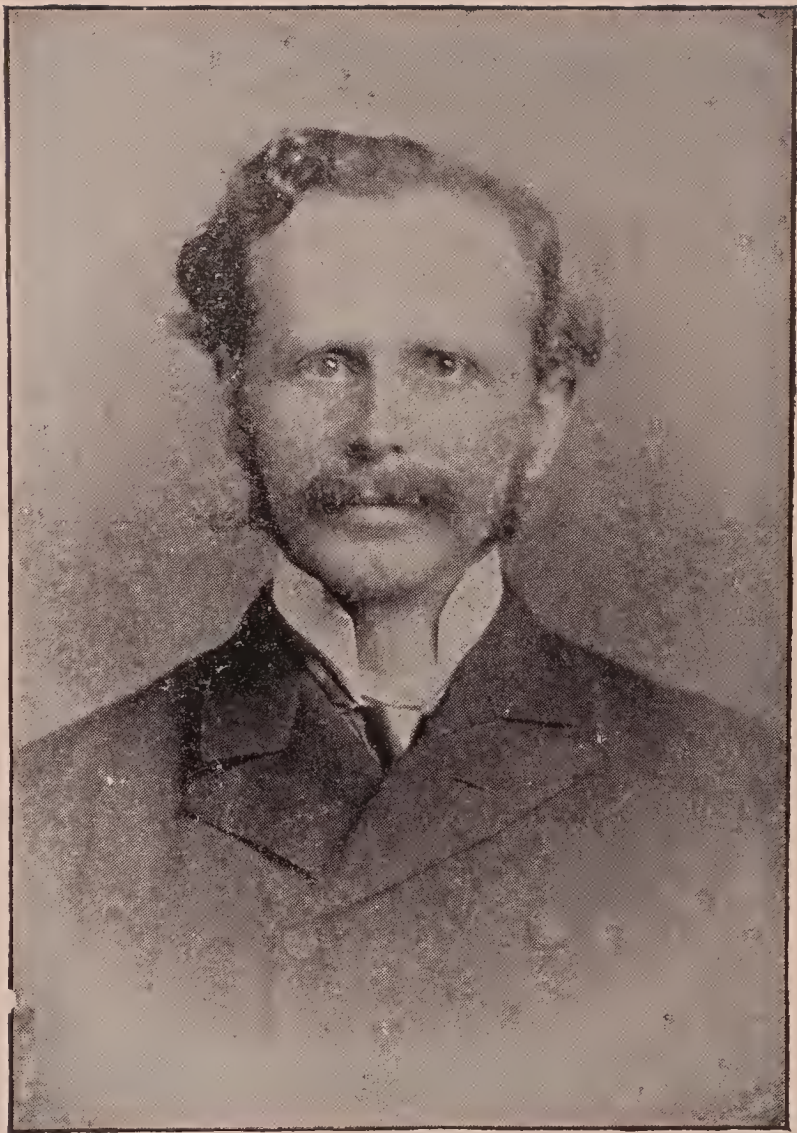
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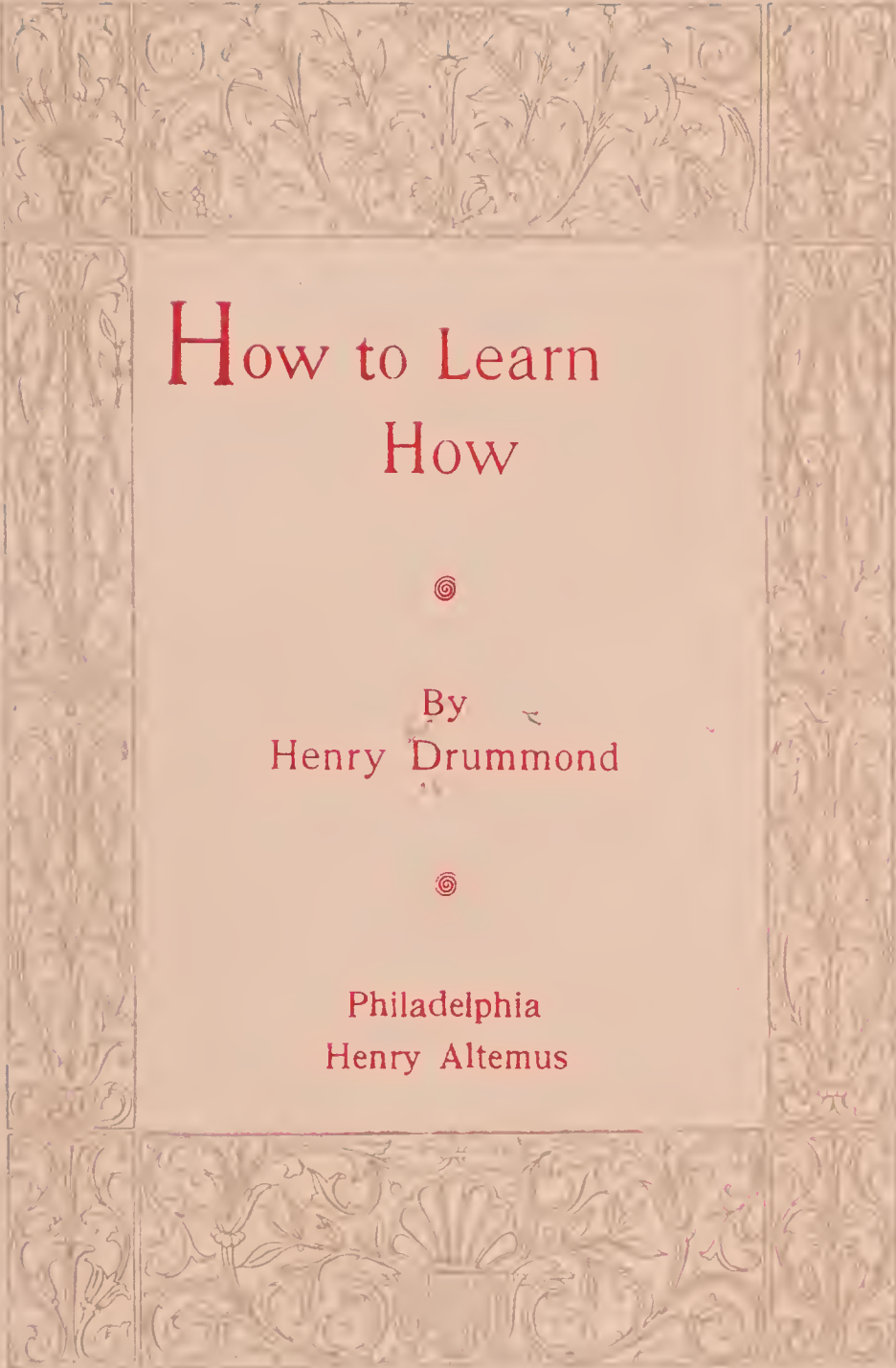
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How to Learn How

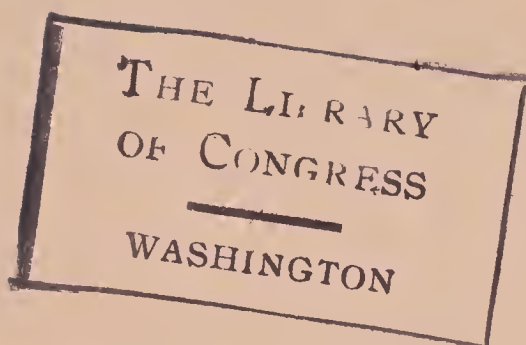


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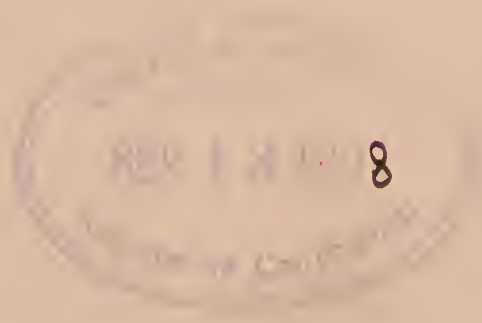
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HOW TO LEARN HOW.

- I. DEALING WITH DOUBT.
- II. PREPARATION FOR LEARNING.

DEALING WITH DOUBT.

THERE is a subject which I think we as workers amongst young men cannot afford to keep out of sight—I mean the subject of “Doubt.” We are forced to face that subject. We have no choice. I would rather let it alone; but every day of my life I meet men who doubt, and I am quite sure that most of you have innumerable interviews every year with men who raise skeptical difficulties about religion. Now, it becomes a matter of great practical importance

that we should know how to deal wisely with these men. Upon the whole, I think these are the best men in the country. I speak of my own country. I speak of the universities with which I am familiar, and I say that the men who are perplexed—the men who come to you with serious and honest difficulties—are the best men. They are men of intellectual honesty, and cannot allow themselves to be put to rest by words, or phrases, or traditions, or theologies, but who must get to the bottom of things for themselves. And if I am not mistaken, Christ was very fond of these men. The outsiders always interested Him, and touched Him. The ortho-

dox people — the Pharisees — He was much less interested in. He went with publicans and sinners — with people who were in revolt against the respectability, intellectual and religious, of the day. And following Him, we are entitled to give sympathetic consideration to those whom He loved and took trouble with.

First, let me speak for a moment or two about the origin of doubt. In the first place, we are born questioners. Look at the wonderment of a little child in its eyes before it can speak. The child's great word when it begins to speak is, "Why?" Every child is full of every kind of questions, about every kind of thing that moves, and

shines, and changes, in the little world in which it lives. That is the incipient doubt in the nature of man. Respect doubt for its origin. It is an inevitable thing. It is not a thing to be crushed. It is a part of man as God made him. Heresy is truth in the making, and doubt is the prelude of knowledge.

Secondly: The world is a Sphinx. It is a vast riddle — an unfathomable mystery; and on every side there is temptation to questioning. In every leaf, in every cell of every leaf, there are a hundred problems. There are ten good years of a man's life in investigating what is in the leaf, and there are five good years more in

investigating the things that are in the things that are in the leaf. God has planned the world to incite men to intellectual activity.

Thirdly: The instrument with which we attempt to investigate truth is impaired. Some say it fell, and the glass is broken. Some say prejudice, heredity or sin, have spoiled its sight, and have blinded our eyes and deadened our ears. In any case the instruments with which we work upon truth, even in the strongest men, are feeble and inadequate to their tremendous task.

And in the fourth place, all religious truths are doubtable. There is no absolute proof for any one of them.

Even that fundamental truth — the existence of a God — no man can prove by reason. The ordinary proof for the existence of God involves either an assumption, argument in a circle, or a contradiction. The impression of God is kept up by experience; not by logic. And hence, when the experimental religion of a man, of a community, or of a nation, wanes, religion wanes — their idea of God grows indistinct, and that man, community or nation becomes infidel. Bear in mind, then, that all religious truths are doubtable — even those which we hold most strongly.

What does this brief account of the origin of doubt teach us? It teaches us

— great intellectual humility. It teaches us sympathy and toleration with all men who venture upon the ocean of truth to find out a path through it for themselves. Do you sometimes feel yourself thinking unkind things about your fellow-students who have intellectual difficulty? I know how hard it is always to feel sympathy and toleration for them; but we must address ourselves to that most carefully and most religiously. If my brother is short-sighted, I must not abuse him or speak against him; I must pity him, and if possible try to improve his sight or to make things that he is to look at so bright that he cannot help seeing. But never let us think evil of men who

do not see as we do. From the bottom of our hearts let us pity them, and let us take them by the hand and spend time and thought over them, and try to lead them to the true light.

What has been the Church's treatment of doubt in the past? It has been very simple. "There is a heretic. Burn him!" That is all. "There is a man who has gone off the road. Bring him back and torture him!" We have got past that physically; have we got past it morally? What does the modern Church say to a man who is skeptical? Not "Burn him!" but "Brand him!" "Brand him! — call him a bad name." And in many countries at the present time a man

who is branded as a heretic is despised, tabooed, and put out of religious society, much more than if he had gone wrong in morals. I think I am speaking within the facts when I say that a man who is unsound is looked upon in many communities with more suspicion and with more pious horror than a man who now and then gets drunk. "Burn him!" "Brand him!" "Excommunicate him!" That has been the Church's treatment of doubt, and that is perhaps to some extent the treatment which we ourselves are inclined to give to the men who cannot see the truths of Christianity as we see them. Contrast Christ's treatment of doubt. I have spoken already of His strange

partiality for the outsiders—for the scattered heretics up and down the country; of the care with which He loved to deal with them, and of the respect in which He held their intellectual difficulties. Christ never failed to distinguish between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is *can't believe*; unbelief is *won't believe*. Doubt is honesty; unbelief is obstinacy. Doubt is looking for light; unbelief is content with darkness. Loving darkness rather than light—that is what Christ attacked, and attacked unsparingly. But for the intellectual questioning of Thomas, and Philip, and Nicodemus, and the many others who came to Him to have their great problems solved,

He was respectful and generous and tolerant.

And how did He meet their doubts? The Church, as I have said, says, "Brand him!" Christ said, "Teach him." He destroyed by fulfilling. When Thomas came to Him and denied His very resurrection, and stood before Him waiting for the scathing words and lashing for his unbelief, they never came. They never came. Christ gave him facts—facts. No man can go around facts. Christ said, "Behold My hands and My feet." The great god of science at the present time is a fact. It works with facts. Its cry is, "Give me facts." Found anything you like upon facts and we will believe

it. The spirit of Christ was the scientific spirit. He founded His religion upon facts; and He asked all men to found their religion upon facts. Now, gentlemen, get up the facts of Christianity, and take men to the facts. Theologies—and I am not speaking disrespectfully of theology; theology is as scientific a thing as any other science of facts—but theologies are human versions of Divine truths, and hence the varieties of the versions, and the inconsistencies of them. I would allow a man to select whichever version of this truth he liked *afterwards*; but I would ask him to begin with no version, but go back to the facts and base his Christian life upon

that. That is the great lesson of the New Testament way of looking at doubt — of Christ's treatment of doubt. It is not "Brand him!" — but lovingly, wisely, and tenderly to teach him. Faith is never opposed to reason in the New Testament; it is opposed to sight. You will find that a principle worth thinking over. *Faith is never opposed to reason in the New Testament, but to sight.*

Well, now; with these principles in mind as to the origin of doubt, and as to Christ's treatment of it, how are we ourselves to deal with our fellow-students who are in intellectual difficulty? In the first place, I think we must make all the concessions to

them that we conscientiously can. When a doubter first encounters you he pours out a deluge of abuse of churches, and ministers, and creeds, and Christians. Nine-tenths of what he says is probably true. Make concessions. Agree with him. It does him good to unburden himself of these things. He has been cherishing them for years — laying them up against Christians, against the Church, and against Christianity; and now he is startled to find the first Christian with whom he has talked over the thing almost entirely agrees with him. We are, of course, not responsible for everything that is said in the name of Christianity; but a man does not give

up medicine because there are quack doctors, and no man has a right to give up his Christianity because there are spurious or inconsistent Christians. Then, as I have already said, creeds are human versions of Divine truths; and we do not ask a man to accept all the creeds, any more than we ask him to accept all the Christians. We ask him to accept Christ, and the facts about Christ, and the words of Christ. But you will find the battle is half won when you have endorsed the man's objections, and possibly added a great many more to the charges which he has against ourselves. These men are in revolt against the kind of religion which we exhibit to the world,—

against the cant that is taught in the name of Christianity. And if the men that have never seen the real thing — if you could show them that, they would receive it as eagerly as you do. They are merely in revolt against the imperfections and inconsistencies of those who represent Christ to the world.

Second: Beg them to set aside, by an act of will, all unsolved problems: such as the problem of the origin of evil, the problem of the Trinity, the problem of the relation of human will and predestination, and so on — problems which have been investigated for thousands of years without result — ask them to set those problems aside as

insoluble in the meantime, just as a man who is studying mathematics may be asked to set aside the problem of squaring the circle. Let him go on with what can be done, and what has been done, and leave out of sight the impossible. You will find that will relieve the skeptic's mind of a great deal of unnecessary cargo that has been in his way.

Thirdly: Talking about difficulties, as a rule, only aggravates them. Entire satisfaction to the intellect is unattainable about any of the greater problems, and if you try to get to the bottom of them by argument, there is no bottom there; and, therefore, you make the matter worse. But I would

say what is known, and what can be honestly and philosophically and scientifically said about one or two of the difficulties that the doubter raises, just to show him that you can do it—to show him that you are not a fool—that you are not merely groping in the dark yourself, but you have found whatever basis is possible. But I would not go around all the doctrines. I would simply do that with one or two; because the moment you cut off one, a hundred other heads will grow in its place. It would be a pity if all these problems could be solved. The joy of the intellectual life would be largely gone. I would not rob a man of his problems, nor would I have another

man rob me of my problems. They are the delight of life, and the whole intellectual world would be stale and unprofitable if we knew everything.

Fourthly—and this is the great point: Turn away from the reason, and go into the man's moral life. I don't mean, go into his moral life and see if the man is living in conscious sin, which is the great blinder of the eyes—I am speaking now of honest doubt; but open a new door into the practical side of man's nature. Entreat him not to postpone life and his life's usefulness until he has settled the problems of the universe. Tell him those problems will never all be settled; that his life will be done before he has

begun to settle them ; and ask him what he is doing with his life meantime. Charge him with wasting his life and his usefulness ; and invite him to deal with the moral and practical difficulties of the world, and leave the intellectual difficulties as he goes along. To spend time upon these is proving the less important before the more important ; and, as the French say, "The good is the enemy of the best." It is a good thing to think ; it is a better thing to work — it is a better thing to do good. And you have him there, you see. He can't get beyond that. You have to tell him, in fact, that there are two organs of knowledge : the one reason, the other obedience. And

now tell him, as he has tried the first and found the little in it, just for a moment or two to join you in trying the second. And when he asks whom he is to obey, you tell him there is but One, and lead him to the great historical figure, who calls all men to Him: the one perfect life—the one Saviour of mankind—the one Light of the world. Ask him to begin to obey Christ; and, doing His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

That, I think, is about the only thing you can do with a man: to get him into practical contact with the needs of the world, and to let him lose his intellectual difficulties meantime.

Don't ask him to give them up altogether. Tell him to solve them afterward one by one if he can, but meantime to give his life to Christ and his time to the kingdom of God. And, you see, you fetch him completely around when you do that. You have taken him away from the false side of his nature, and to the practical and moral side of his nature; and for the first time in his life, perhaps, he puts things in their true place. He puts his nature in the relations in which it ought to be, and he then only begins to live. And by obedience — by obedience — he will soon become a learner and pupil for himself, and Christ will teach him things, and he will find whatever

problems are solvable gradually solved as he goes along the path of practical duty.

Now, let me, in closing, give a couple of instances of how to deal with specific points. The commonest thing that we hear said nowadays by young men is, "What about evolution? How am I to reconcile my religion, or any religion, with the doctrine of evolution?" That upsets more men than perhaps anything else at the present hour. How would you deal with it? I would say to a man that Christianity is the further evolution. I don't know any better definition than that. It is the further evolution—the higher evolution. I don't start with him to attack evolu-

tion. I don't start with him to defend it. I destroy by fulfilling it. I take him at his own terms. He says evolution is that which pushes the man on from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher. Very well; that is what Christianity does. It pushes the man farther on. It takes him where nature has left him, and carries him on to heights which on the plain of nature he could never reach. That is evolution. "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." That is evolution. It is the development of the whole man in the higher directions—the drawing out of his spiritual being. Show an evolutionist that, and you take the wind out of his sails. "I

came not to destroy." Don't destroy his doctrine — perhaps you can't — but fulfil it. Put a larger meaning into it.

The other instance — the next commonest perhaps — is the question of miracles. It is impossible, of course, to discuss that now — miracles; but that question is thrown at my head every second day: "What do you say to a man when he says to you, 'Why do you believe in miracles?'" I say, "Because I have seen them." He says, "When?" I say, "Yesterday." He says, "Where?" "Down such-and-such a street I saw a man who was a drunkard redeemed by the power of an unseen Christ and saved from sin. That is a miracle." The

best apologetic for Christianity is a Christian. That is a fact which the man cannot get over. There are fifty other arguments for miracles, but none so good as that you have seen them. Perhaps you are one yourself. But take you a man and show him a miracle with his own eyes. Then he will believe.

PREPARATION FOR LEARNING.

BEFORE an artist can do anything the instrument must be tuned. Our astronomers at this moment are preparing for an event which happens only once or twice in a lifetime: the total eclipse of the sun in the month of August. They have begun already. They are making preparations. At chosen stations in different parts of the world they are spending all the skill that science can suggest upon the construction of their instruments; and up

to the last moment they will be busy adjusting them ; and the last day will be the busiest of all, because then they must have the glasses and the mirrors polished to the last degree. They have to have the lenses in place and focussed upon this spot before the event itself takes place.

Every thing will depend upon the instruments which you bring to this experiment. Every thing will depend upon it ; and, therefore, fifteen minutes will not be lost if we each put our instrument into the best working order we can. I have spoken of lenses, and that reminds me that the instrument which we bring to bear upon truth is a compound thing. It con-

sists of many parts. Truth is not a product of the intellect alone; it is a product of the whole nature. The body is engaged in it, and the mind, and the soul.

The body is engaged in it. Of course, a man who has his body run down, or who is dyspeptic, or melancholy, sees everything black, and disordered, and untrue. But I am not going to dwell upon that. Most of you seem in pretty fair working order so far as your bodies are concerned; only it is well to remember that we are to give our bodies a living sacrifice—not a half-dead sacrifice, as some people seem to imagine. There is no virtue in emaciation. I don't know if you have any

tendency in that direction in America, but certainly we are in danger of dropping into it now and then in England, and it is just as well to bear in mind our part of the lens — a very compound and delicate lens — with which we have to take in truth.

Then comes a very important part: the intellect — which is one of the most useful servants of truth; and I need not tell you as students, that the intellect will have a great deal to do with your reception of truth. I was told that it was said at these conferences last year, that a man must crucify his intellect. I venture to contradict the gentleman who made that statement. I am quite sure no such statement

could ever have been made in your hearing—that we were to crucify our intellects. We can make no progress without the full use of all the intellectual powers that God has endowed us with.

But more important than either of these is the moral nature—the moral and spiritual nature. Some of you remember a sermon of Robertson of Brighton, entitled “Obedience the Organ of Spiritual Knowledge.” A very startling title!—“Obedience the Organ of Spiritual Knowledge.” The Pharisees asked about Christ: “How knoweth this man letters, never having learned?” How knoweth this man, never having learned? The organ of

knowledge is not nearly so much mind, as the organ that Christ used, namely, obedience; and that was the organ which He Himself insisted upon when He said: "He that willeth to do His will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." You have all noticed, of course, that the words in the original are: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." It doesn't read, "If any do His will," which no man can do perfectly; but if any man be simply willing to do His will—if he has an absolutely undivided mind about it—that man will know what truth is and know what falsehood is; a stranger will he not follow. And that is by far the best

source of spiritual knowledge on every account — obedience to God — absolute sincerity and loyalty in following Christ. “If any man do His will he shall know” — a very remarkable association of knowledge, a thing which is usually considered quite intellectual, with obedience, which is moral and spiritual.

But even although we use all these three different parts of the instrument, we have not at all got at the complete method of learning. There is a little preliminary that the astronomer has to do before he can make his observation. He has to take the cap off his telescope. Many a man thinks he is looking at truth when he is only looking at the

cap. Many a time I have looked down my microscope, and thought I was looking at the diatom for which I had long been searching, and found I had simply been looking at a speck of dust upon the lens itself. Many a man thinks he is looking at truth when he is only looking at the spectacles he has put on to see it with. He is looking at his own spectacles. Now, the common spectacles that a man puts on—I suppose the creed in which he has been brought up—if a man looks at that, let him remember that he is not looking at truth: he is looking at his own spectacles. There is no more important lesson that we have to carry with us than that truth is not to be

found in what I have been taught. That is not truth. Truth is not what I have been taught. If it were so, that would apply to the Mormon, it would apply to the Brahman, it would apply to the Buddhist. Truth would be to everybody just what he had been taught. Therefore let us dismiss from our minds the predisposition to regard that which we have been brought up in as being necessarily the truth. I must say it is very hard to shake one's self free altogether from that. I suppose it is impossible.

But you see the reasonableness of giving up that as your view of truth when you come to apply it all around. If that were the definition of truth,

truth would be just what one's parents were—it would be a thing of hereditary transmission, and not a thing absolute in itself. Now, let me venture to ask you to take that cap off. Take that cap off now, and make up your minds you are going to look at truth naked—in its reality as it is, not as it is reflected through other minds, or through any theology, however venerable.

Then there is one thing I think we must be careful about, and that is besides having the cap off, and having all the lenses clean and in position—to have the instrument rightly focussed. Everything may be right, and yet when you go and look at the object, you see

things altogether falsely. You see things not only blurred, but you see things out of proportion. And there is nothing more important we have to bear in mind in running our eye over successive theological truths, or religious truths, than that there is a proportion in those truths, and that we must see them in their proportion, or we see them falsely. A man may take a dollar or a half-dollar and hold it to his eye so closely that he will hide the sun from him. Or he may so focus his telescope that a fly or a boulder may be as large as a mountain. A man may hold a certain doctrine, very intensely — a doctrine which has been looming upon his horizon for

the last six months, let us say, and which has thrown everything else out of proportion, it has become so big itself. Now let us beware of distortion in the arrangement of the religious truths which we hold. It is almost impossible to get things in their true proportion and symmetry, but this is the thing we must be constantly aiming at. We are told in the Bible to "add to your faith virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge balance," as the word literally means — *balance*. It is a word taken from the orchestra, where all the parts — the sopranos, the basses, the altos, and the tenors, and all the rest of them — must be regulated. If you have too

much of the bass, or too much of the soprano, there is want of harmony. That is what I mean by the want of proper focus — by the want of proper balance — in the truths which we all hold. It will never do to exaggerate one truth at the expense of another, and a truth may be turned into a falsehood very, very easily, by simply being either too much enlarged or too much diminished. I once heard of some blind men who were taken to see a menagerie. They had gone around the animals, and four of them were allowed to touch an elephant as they went past. They were discussing afterwards what kind of a creature the elephant was. One man, who had

touched its tail, said the elephant was like a rope. Another of the blind men, who had touched his hind limb, said, "No such thing! the elephant is like the trunk of a tree." Another, who had felt its sides, said, "That is all rubbish. An elephant is a thing like a wall." And the fourth, who had felt its ear, said that an elephant was like none of those things; it was like a leather bag. Now, men look at truth at different bits of it, and they see different things, of course, and they are very apt to imagine that the thing which they have seen is the whole affair — the whole thing. In reality, we can only see a very little bit at a time; and we must, I think,

learn to believe that other men can see bits of truth as well as ourselves. Your views are just what you see with your own eyes ; and my views are just what I see ; and what I see depends on just where I stand, and what you see depends on just where you stand ; and truth is very much bigger than an elephant, and we are very much blinder than any of those blind men as we come to look at it.

Christ has made us aware that it is quite possible for a man to have ears and hear nothing, and to have eyes and see not. One of the disciples saw a great deal of Christ, and he never knew Him. "Have I been so long time with you,

Philip, and yet hast thou not known Me?" "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also." Philip had never seen Him. He had been looking at his own spectacles, perhaps, or at something else, and had never seen Him. If the instrument had been in order, he would have seen Christ. And I would just add this one thing more: the test of value of the different verities of truth depends upon one thing: whether they have or have not a sanctifying power. That is another remarkable association in the mind of Christ — of sanctification with truth — thinking and holiness — not to be found in any of the sciences or in any of the philosophies. It is peculiar to the

Bible. Christ said "Sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy word is truth." Now, the value of any question—the value of any theological question—depends upon whether it has a sanctifying influence. If it has not, don't bother about it. Don't let it disturb your minds until you have exhausted all truths that have sanctification within them. If a truth makes a man a better man, then let him focus his instrument upon it and get all the acquaintance with it he can. If it is the profane babbling of science, falsely so called, or anything that has injurious effect upon the moral and spiritual nature of man, it is better let alone. And above all, let us remem-

ber to hold the truth in love. That is the most sanctifying influence of all. And if we can carry away the mere lessons of toleration, and leave behind us our censoriousness, and criticalness, and harsh judgments upon one another, and excommunicating of everybody except those who think exactly as we do, the time we shall spend here will not be the least useful parts of our lives.

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